



HireAbility

Newsletter of the Governor's Committee on Employment and Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities

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Special Edition

October 2001

The Governor's Committee Announces 2001 Award Winners

Annual Award Ceremony was held at the Sheraton Hotel in Anchorage.

A capacity crowd attended the 2001 Awards Ceremony sponsored by the "Governor's Committee for the Employment and Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities". This year's event was held on October 25, 2001 in the Howard Rock Ballroom of the Sheraton Hotel.

The Governor's Committee is a non-partisan citizen's advisory group, comprised of volunteers appointed by the Governor of Alaska. These individuals come with various backgrounds from all over the State. Their purpose is to promote and encourage the employment and rehabilitation of Alaskans with disabilities. And each year the Committee seeks out individuals, organizations, and businesses who have made significant contributions toward these goals.

Carolyn Peter Volunteerism Award

This year's ceremony was dedicated the memory of Carolyn Peter, a former teacher, Director of the Center for the Blind, member of the Governor's Committee, and last year's Alaskan of the Year. Carolyn passed away this last September. In her memory a new award category was added to the program; The Carolyn Peter Volunteerism Award. The award recognizes special individuals who have devoted their lives to volunteer work that goes above and beyond. This year's award winner is **Cindi Martin** from Anchorage. Cindi also recently passed away, but her life was an inspiration to all who knew her. She was a certified Braille

transcriber and sign language interpreter. She will always be remembered as an outstanding contributor to the blind and deaf community in Anchorage. Her award was accepted by Jim King the current Director of the Center for the Blind in Anchorage

Alaskan of the Year

This award is given to the individual with a disability, whose achievements are an inspiration to all people. The winner of this award for 2001 is **Sabine Becker**, of Wasilla, Alaska. Sabine



was born in West Germany with birth defects associated with the drug "thalidomide" but she never accepted her life with a disability as being different. She simply learned to adapt. Sabine has a Master's degree in clinical psychology and has worked with children from France, Somalia, Ethiopia, Switzerland, Canada, and the United States. She is also a renowned "foot artist" who creates a line of Spirit Dolls assembled from Alaskan native materials. Sabine is a successful artist, parent, public speaker, and inspirational role model.

Governor's Award

This award recognizes the public, private, or civic organization that has done the most to promote awareness of the abilities and potential of people with disabilities. The winner of this year's



award is **Outdoor Recreation & Community Access (ORCA)** of Juneau. ORCA has been recognized for the multitude of activities it provides for individuals with disabilities. It provides individuals with life-long recreational opportunities, community involvement, and expanded horizons.

Chairman's Award

This award recognizes an individual or agency that has made exceptional efforts to increase the employment of people with disabilities and the awareness of their contributions to society. This year TWO awards were given. **Tom Rentz** and **Keegan Reilly** were so honored.

Tom is the manager of the laundry facilities at Fort Richardson. Tom has been a pivotal figure in the employment of people with disabilities and actively promotes the Disability Awareness Program on the Post. He has also participated in the Special Olympic games recently held in Anchorage.



Keegan Reilly is currently attending a computer science program at Oregon State University. Although he suffered a spinal injury at the age of 15, he has never let his disability stop him from participating in the activities he loves. Keegan skis, snorkels, fishes, kayaks, and recently took up mountain climbing. With a unique "climbing wheelchair" he was able to summit Colorado's 14,400-foot Mount Elbert this past July. This feat was featured on national television.

Removal of Attitudinal Barriers Award

This award recognizes the agency, company, or individual that has made a significant contribution to reducing or eliminating

attitudinal barriers facing people with disabilities. This year's award winner is **Beth LaCrosse** of Ketchikan. Beth is a former member of the Governor's Committee and President of the Alaskan branch of the "National Alliance of Mentally Ill" (NAMI). Beth is a staunch mental health advocate who continually fights for the employment of individuals with mental illness. She is a compassionate, energetic, and very dedicated woman.



Barrier-Free Design Award

This award recognizes the builder, architect, or owner whose facility design and construction demonstrates awareness and exceptional provisions for access and use by people with disabilities. This year's winner is **Dan McDowell**. Dan (also known as the "Last Frontiersman") is a lifelong Alaskan and charter boat operator on the Kenai River. In August of this year, he launched the first "accessible" riverboat ever to be used on the river. His boat has ramps and special gear that provides accessible, safe, and enjoyable Alaska wilderness experiences for everyone. Dan states that he hopes others will follow his lead and make more of Alaska's wild places available to people with disabilities.



Hewitt Memorial

The Hewitt Memorial is given to honor a rehabilitation specialist whose work has been of extraordinary benefit to people with disabilities. This year's honoree is **Dave Quisenberry** of Juneau. Dave is the Chief of Rehabilitation Services for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. His efforts are extraordinary because he is all too frequently required to walk a very fine line as caretaker of the public trust, ensuring that ALL Alaskans with disabilities receive the necessary services required to obtain or maintain meaningful employment. He has

also encouraged his staff to develop their skills and to use innovative means to assist and promote employment for people with disabilities.

Large Employer of the Year Award

This award recognizes a business with more than 200 employees that has made an exceptional effort to employ people with disabilities and to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. This year's winner is **REACH, Inc.** of Juneau. REACH



administers a number of programs which employ people with disabilities. It also

enthusiastically reaches out to the

community to inform employers of the advantages employing people with disabilities can provide. This organization is an inspiration to other individuals and organizations.

Small Employer of the Year Award

This award recognizes a business with fewer than 200 employees that has made an exceptional effort to employ people with disabilities and to comply with the "Americans With Disabilities Act". This year's winner is **Dave and Maggie's Café** in Anchorage.

Dave Lafever and his wife Maggie provide a consistent message of what can be achieved by people who face barriers to employment and community life. Their small café not only employs people with disabilities, but Dave is also an active member of the Business Enterprise Program and he has addressed the U. S. House of Representatives-Ways and Means Committee on development of initiatives to serve the underemployed. Together they have committed themselves to the removal of barriers and enhanced employment opportunities for people with disabilities.



Our Special Thanks go to ...

- Dr. Richard Radtke, Ph.D., Professor of Oceanography from the University of Hawaii



who was the featured speaker. Dr. Radtke has just returned from McGrath and Shageluk as part of the Dream

Catcher's Program that encourages high school students with disabilities to consider careers in science, math, engineering and technology. He spoke passionately about the need for people with disabilities to work toward their dreams.

- Ms. Ronda McBride, reporter for KTUU Television for her wonderful contribution as our emcee.

Do You Know a Business or Individual Who Deserves Recognition?

Each year the Governor's honors special individuals, businesses and organizations because of their contributions to the disabled of Alaska. They can be role models, managers who have recognized the needs of the disabled public and taken steps to provide accessibility or even providers of services to the disabled who have demonstrated dedication and service above and beyond the normal. You, the public, identify these individuals. If you would like to nominate a candidate for next year's awards, or would just like to find out more about the awards program, contact Velja Elstad at 1-800-478-2815, or visit the Governor's Committee Website at:

<http://www.labor.state.ak.us/govscomm/index.htm>

Upcoming Meetings

The Governor's Committee meets once every three months at various locations around Alaska. All meetings are open to the public and everyone is invited to listen to the meetings and have their public testimony heard on the first evening at each location. The next scheduled meeting of the Committee will be held in Juneau on January 23-25, 2002. Meetings are planned for April 17-19 in Fairbanks & June on the Kenai Peninsula.

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